

Remnant Life Church  
December 3, 2023  
**Christmas 2023:**  
**Preparing Myself for the King**  
Pt 1  
Genesis 19:15-26

Whenever polls are utilized and the question asked is ‘what is your favorite holiday of the year’, Christmas appears at the top of the list every single time.

- And why not?!
  - We love the decorations
  - The festive atmosphere that is introduced into otherwise bland and colorless places
  - We enjoy the gifts given and received
  - The Christmas traditions are wonderful including family, the songs, and even the Christmas movies that come on every year.
  - And for those of us with many Christmases to recall, the memories of childhood at this time of year are generally very positive and bring a warmth to our spirits that is unique and, in many ways, unmatched.
- But like so many events and times in our lives that are emotionally intense, Christmas can also be a very difficult time
  - There are those who have very few happy memories growing up
  - If a very painful or difficult event occurred in someone’s life toward the end of the calendar year Christmas can represent a time of failure or great pain
  - And for those who are experiencing Christmas or any notable time of the year for the first time without a loved one there is sorrow attached to an otherwise very joyous occasion

But what is the one thing that is common about each of those observations, whether good or bad?

- They are primarily generated by the external
- They are dominated by our senses and things that have happened to us recently or in the past.

But what about those things of the past?

- Experiences, events and people that were once a part of our
- And that mark may be a very good one or it could be a very bad one
  - How much are they continuing to influence your life today?
  - And how tightly are they holding you to a past that, in most cases, you should be letting go of?

I’d like to begin a series this morning leading up to our Christmas service that will answer the question, ‘How can I prepare myself for the coming of a king?’

- IOW, as we enter into this Christmas season there should be joy in our hearts as we recognize the time that God left heaven and came to walk among us
  - But joy is in short supply these days
  - We cannot always change those things that are external

- But we can certainly address those things within our lives that prevent us from enjoying the beauty of this season

The first one I would like to look at this morning is dealing with things of the past and the most powerful of emotions attached to that - forgiveness

### READ – Genesis 19:15-26

This familiar story demonstrates, with great clarity, the danger of holding onto the past

- Lot's wife, despite being told very clearly not to look back, did and the consequences were severe
- Now while our holding on to the past likely will not turn us into a pillar of salt, the dangers are no less real
  - Unhealthy relationships, experiences of failure, times of woundedness, poor decisions are all a part of our pasts in varying degrees
  - Not one of those must continue to negatively impact your life today!
- Let's look quickly at three important elements of dealing with the past

The first is that we must recognize the power of the past

- The problem is that time tends to distort our memory
  - This is certainly true regarding old relationships
  - Especially those that were harmful, unhealthy, and painful
    - As time goes on, for some reason, the bad fades and the good of the relationship, no matter how little there actually was, moves to the forefront
    - This is why unhealthy relationships can remain active for so long
      - It becomes a cycle of removing yourself from that person, the bad memories begin to fade, the relationship is rekindled, the truth of the unhealthy nature becomes evident again, you remove yourself and it cycles around
    - This is why it is so important to break the soul-ties of past relationships
      - That is as simple as, in prayer, renouncing that relationship, and asking God to cleanse your heart and mind of it
      - While that may sound a bit harsh it is necessary
  - Lot's wife looked back because she was still tied to her past
    - She could not let go even though her life was surrounded by and influenced by evil and sin
    - She was tied to the old instead of looking forward to what was new in her life because of what God was doing
  - The past can be very powerful but it need not possess us

Secondly, we should not dwell on our past mistakes

- We all have those moments, those seasons of our lives that we would like to forget
  - Mistakes are a part of life and if someone tells you they have no regrets in their life they either are delusional regarding their lives or they have justified everything primarily by not accepting responsibility
    - How easy is it to brush things off when you make it everyone else's fault
    - We often talk about maturing as a Christian in our daily walk

- One of the strongest indicators that is happening is by accepting responsibility for your decisions and your failures
- People will go to great lengths to convince themselves that something is not their fault
- You are an adult – own it!
- Because no one forces you to do what you do – it is a choice!

Third, is the danger of holding on to past hurts and grievances

- Few things hold us more tightly to our past than those who have hurt us
  - Most times your emotions are justified but the emotions must not be permitted to persist and fester over time
    - But there are those times when we CHOOSE to be offended when none was intended
  - Still, hurts are genuine, and they often occur in those places where we desperately want to feel the safest
    - Our homes and in our church
    - Parents, relatives, pastors or others who we often look to can cause some of the deepest wounds
    - But to hold on to your bitterness and anger in no way helps you to heal
  - As a matter of fact, holding on to bitterness, anger and unforgiveness only hurts one person
    - Not the one who hurt you
      - Those negative emotions only hurt you
      - And they will prevent you from moving on, healing and leaving it behind
    - Unforgiveness is something unique unto itself
      - The Bible speaks of unforgiveness often and even Jesus addressed it
      - He said in **Matt 6:15**, *...if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*
      - This is an issue of not only your life here but your eternal life
    - Forgiving is not easy, but we are called, as a child of God, to do so
      - It takes courage, and it takes strength
      - But it is the mark of a man or woman who is more mindful of kingdom life than this temporary earthly life
        - And forgiveness is a sure way to keep the life of a church family healthy
        - Mistakes are made, things are said in jest but still hurt

**How do you forgive?**

1. It begins with the choice of letting go
  - a. Lot's wife couldn't let Sodom and Gomorrah go and the cost was her life
  - b. In the same way if we hold on to our sins, our failures, our hurts and our mistakes we are no different than she was
  - c. **Isa 43:18** - *Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*

- d. To be held or stuck in that place brings with it an emotional and spiritual paralysis
  - e. It means you cannot move forward, you cannot grow, and you cannot receive all that God has for you in the here and now – because you stuck in the past
2. Forgiveness for others begins with the knowledge of God’s grace given to you
- a. Lot and his family were offered safety not because of their righteousness but because of God’s mercy
  - b. **I John 1:9** - *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*
  - c. Forgiveness is not something we deserve or can earn
    - i. It is a gift
    - ii. It is a manifestation of God’s love which we can not fully comprehend but is nevertheless made available to each of us.
  - d. Forgiveness, like letting go of the past, is a choice
    - i. The world chooses to forgive based on the severity of the offense and the retribution requires
    - ii. God’s children forgive unconditionally regardless of what had taken place
      - 1. Why?
      - 2. Because God forgave each of us in the same way
3. Finally, God’s forgiveness is transformative
- a. When we experience the forgiveness of God it transforms our lives so that we are not the same
    - i. It liberates us from the chains of guilt and shame we carry with us when we stay attached to the past
    - ii. It also heals our brokenness meaning we are now able to offer that same forgiveness to others
    - iii. The debts and need to exact a payment are no longer present
  - b. **In Psalm 130:4** - *But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.*
  - c. The Hebrew word for forgiveness is *sell-ee-kahw*
    - i. It is a term used in courts of law meaning to pardon or release someone from a debt or obligation
    - ii. When God forgave you from the debt of sin you were not longer required to pay the price of death
      - 1. It was not conditional, and it did not matter what you had done
      - 2. That is the same way we must forgive others
    - iii. Your response may be, “I could never forgive them for what they did to me!”
      - 1. That choice means you are willingly forfeiting God’s forgiveness of your sins
      - 2. And always remember, your refusal to forgive never hurts them, only you!

Forgiveness is a process – both for us and toward others

- For our own lives it is a journey with several steps

- First, we must acknowledge our sins and confess them to God
  - That requires humility and honesty
  - Then understanding that we are in total and complete need of God's love and mercy
- Then we must receive or accept His forgiveness
  - Understand what that means
  - It is total and complete needing or accepting nothing from us – it is a gift
- When we walk in that forgiveness it is then about a relationship
  - A relationship that has been healed, repaired, and restored with God
  - No longer separated or stunted by the sin of our lives but forgiven
- That transformation in our lives from unforgiven to forgiven is then the catalyst that allows us to extend forgiveness to others
  - May I ask you a pointed question this morning?
  - How can you dare to refuse to forgive someone for their slight against you when God has forgiven the full depth of your sin against Him?
    - Remember the parable told by Jesus in **Matthew 18** of the unmerciful servant

**READ - Matthew 18:23-35**

- The point Jesus is making here is that we ought to forgive and be merciful to one another because of the great sins we have been forgiven of by God
  - In this story the King is God
  - The servant is each of us
    - The servant owed the king what would amount to about 20 years of day labor
    - The man owed the servant about a day's wages
  - Again, God has forgiven us so much how dare we refuse to forgive another when it is comparatively so little
- Then look at the consequence of the servant's actions
  - 20 years of torture
  - The point is God's anger will be severe against the one who treat's his brother or sister in this way

So, where are you this morning?

- If you are a child of God, you are forgiven
  - But have you let it go or do you allow satan to hold you there?
  - Paul wrote in **Phil 3:13-14** - *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*
    - He understood that in order to move forward with what God had called him to do he had to let go of the past
    - Let go of the shame and guilt
  - Have you fully accepted the forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus, that is sufficient to carry away the sins of the world?

- You are not identified by what you have done but who you are today, right now, forgiven
- To be released from the shackles of sin and unforgiveness is to experience a peace and freedom that is like nothing else you will know
  - But you must begin by making that choice
  - By taking that first step to receive the forgiveness of God and letting go followed by your choice to forgive others in that same way